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ABSTRACT

Residence communities which were designed to house graduate students have become facilities for all students aged 21 or older. This study surveyed 25 colleges that offer housing to older students, examining the areas of programming, facilities, relationship with the graduate school, student or community governance, and the population itself. The results revealed that, at most institutions, the common characteristic shared by these students is age: all students were 21 or older, with international and older undergraduate students housed in the same facility as graduate students. Facilities were apartment or suite configurations with a variety of cooking facilities and meal plans. Social programming was the primary focus of programming efforts. Relationships between the graduate or professional schools and graduate housing department were usually informal. Opportunities for participation in student government varied. Participation in residents' associations varied with student interest. Although resident staffs were managerial in focus, many were trained to respond to the needs of international students. Respondents felt more could be done to meet the needs of this older student population. (A list of surveyed institutions is included.) (ABL)

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Housing for Single Graduate Students: A Status Report

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Housing for Single Graduate Students: A Status Report

Kathleen Sullivan, William Shipton, John Schuh

Unlike the traditional (18-22 yr. old) undergraduate living in residence halls, the graduate student is a different type of student with unique needs, priorities, and outlooks.

Residence communities which were designed to house graduate students have become facilities for all students age 21 or older. Residence halls that previously may have been thought of as bastions of intellectual prowess and exchange have evolved into communities that are harder to define. Although different from a housing program that is designed for undergraduate students, the elements of an effective housing program for graduate students have not been incorporated at some institutions and certainly are not easily defined.

Method

In a short questionnaire administered to representatives of 25 institutions of higher education that offer housing to older students, the following areas were examined:

1. programming
2. facilities
3. relationship with the graduate school
4. student or community governance
5. the population itself

A listing of participating institutions is attached.

Population

Let us start by examining the population. At most of the institutions surveyed, International students and older undergraduates were housed in the same facility as graduate students. The basic common characteristic shared by students in this community is age. All the students are 21 or

older. Some institutions separate graduate students and older undergrads by creating groupings by academic status such as undergrad, grad, or professional student. The impact of this unique population is felt in many different areas.

Facilities

Traditional corrider-style facilities have given way to apartment or suite configurations. The need for flexibility in how these students use their time points to providing a variety of cooking facilities and offering optional meal plans. This is particularly true for International students who may experience difficulties adjusting to American diets or who simply wish to observe their own dietary laws and customs.

Although there may be a need to provide housing for short periods of time rather than a whole semester, a shortage of space may not allow for this. Optional meal plans, flexibility in rent payment deadlines, month-to-month tenancy, and facilities that are open throughout the year illustrate flexibility on the part of administrators in dealing with graduate students.

Space for group study is frequently used by International students as well as students in specific disciplines. Obviously, though study style varies, the mixing of undergraduates and graduate students sometimes poses a problem relative to academic rigors and personal priorities. In most instances students are placed either in single rooms with a common bath and floor kitchenettes or they are assigned to smaller community groupings such as suites or apartments.

Programming

Social programming seems to be the primary focus of programming efforts at most of the institutions surveyed. While many students

experience extreme financial pressure and need an inexpensive social outlet, others tend to focus so heavily on academic work that social life and social skills often are neglected or under-developed. In this case it can be argued that social programming is developmental.

One institution is planning to use Erikson's theory of adult development as a theoretical framework for planning. Several respondents agreed that skill development or educational programming efforts were reactions to what was observed in the community or perceived as a need. Money management, career decision-making, time and stress management were mentioned as typical non-social programs offered in these communities.

Programs that are social but also provide for a cultural exchange such as International dinners or coffee hours also provide an opportunity for staff and students to become sensitized to the International population. Just as importantly, however, is programming that is sensitive to International students. For example, holiday programming tends to be very Western and neglects other religious calendars or dietary laws. The presence of alcohol at some programs automatically excludes many Eastern students.

Relationship with Graduate School

The relationship between the graduate school or professional schools on most campuses surveyed with graduate housing is informal. The residence life department may consult with the Graduate Dean from time-to-time when the occasion warrants. In situations where a more formal or defined relationship exists, promoting on-campus housing options as part of the recruiting, admission and orientation process is important. In some instances, faculty live in the graduate hall and participate in programming. The faculty/student relationship with graduate or older

students tends to be more collegial in nature than one might find with younger students.

In cases where the graduate school staff includes an International student advisor, the relationship is formal and contact is frequent. Also, in some instances where a student becomes involved with the judicial system, residence life staff have been able to consult the Dean's staff.

Some institutions are working on developing a relationship with the graduate school and see room for greater involvement in orientation, counseling and advocating more available housing for graduate students.

Student Government

Opportunities for participation in student government vary. Comprehensive governance structures that represent both on-campus and off-campus students are few, but valued since it seems that graduate students are widely neglected when it comes to delivery of services. The graduate student senate or council in some cases has representation in academic departments as well.

Specifically in the residence areas, graduate residents' associations, councils or tenants associations take on the responsibility of social programming in the community. Depending on student interest, participation varies from very sparce or inactive to very active. It should be noted, however, that the priorities of these student groups tend to focus on the programming area with student involvement in policy formation only when they are unhappy. By and large the funding for resident student government programs is adequate, well managed, and is collected through an activity fee. There were several instances where undergraduates and graduate students are represented by the same government.

Relationship with International Students Office

Although resident staffs tend to be managerial in focus, many are trained formally by International student service offices to respond to the needs of this often substantial segment of the population. In almost all cases, a working relationship with International student services offices proved to be vital in the areas of programming, crisis intervention, staff training and conflict resolution.

The Future

Generally, respondents agreed that there was quite a bit more that could be done to meet the needs of this population. Formalization of programs and services is necessary. Previously believed to be a population that is without need for staff and whose lives were balanced and without concern, non-traditional resident students are quickly emerging as those whose needs are just as crucial as the traditional college student.

As one respondent indicated, "If there is an administrative crack anywhere at the institution, the graduate (or older) student will inevitably fall through."

Participants in the Study

Purdue

Ohio State

U. of Massachusetts/Amherst

U. of New Hampshire

U. of Michigan

U. of San Francisco

U. of Illinois/Chicago

Colorado State/Ft. Collins

Iowa/Iowa City

Michigan State

Minnesota/Minneapolis

Illinois/Champaign

Columbia

N.Y.U.

Northeastern

Iowa State

Rutgers/New Brunswick

Rutgers/Camden

Rochester Institute of Technology

Mass. Inst. of Technology

St. Michael's College

University of Connecticut

Pace University

University of Wisconsin/Madison

Loyola of Chicago

Suggested Readings

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